



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

mountains, even the mountains of pain. It is no more, as in Job, the struggle to grasp God; it is the full possession of God and supreme peace in this possession.

Israel has shown no metaphysical genius. Israel remained alien to philosophical thought. But what it does show us is how the men of the Old Testament were also tormented by the problem of suffering. Little by little, slowly but unswervingly, Israel became aware of the many aspects of the problem. Every one of the solutions contains a few seeds of truth, and step by step all those attempts culminate in a more and more original, more and more personal attitude. None of those thinkers riddled the puzzle, Job being the only one who

spanned it in its whole breadth. They were as a rule only stopped by the elemental obstacle of the righteous man's suffering. Though the Hebrew thought as such eventually had to recognize that it stood completely powerless before the tragic problem of suffering, yet Israel's faith did triumph over it by means more than once inconclusive (especially those of orthodoxy), but often also by bold intuitive flashes like those found in Isa., chap. 53, or in Ps. 73. These supplement each other just because they are contraries: sovereign efficiency of suffering when it is the self-willed sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty; nothingness of suffering compared with the blissful communion of a soul with the God it loves and of whom it is loved.

THE CHRISTIAN WORLD-ATMOSPHERE

A SERMON

W. H. WOOD, PH.D.

Professor of Biblical Literature in Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire

I John 5:19: The whole world lieth in the evil one.

Acts 17:28: In Him we live and move and have our being.

One of the modern principles largely used in scientific study is phrased: Geography makes history. This principle is an attempt to state the truth that geographical location and climate have an important influence in determining human occupations, character,

social and political ideals, and even moral and religious outlook and character.

Excessive heat enervates and tends to produce irritability of temper and quickness of passion. Excessive cold produces inwardness of life, lack of sustained energy, lack of change, and little progress. Island isolation tends to develop narrowness of outlook, contracted sympathy, local feeling,

and traditionalism; while life in contact with other peoples and other types of civilization tends to broad-mindedness and universalism in thinking. Our long-continued isolation and hundred years of peace with our nearest neighbor may help explain the strength of enervating pacifism which came to expression at the outbreak of the present struggle. In general it is true that civilization follows the boundaries of the temperate zone. Absence of extremes, variety, change, the push of physical necessity without the enervation of the extremes, make this the reality. No great poets, thinkers, reformers, moral or religious leaders, have arisen outside these boundaries.

This principle, if not pushed too far, is seen at once to be a very valuable one. It is suggestive, however, of another line of thought. Is there a specific soul atmosphere, a climate while not absolutely independent of the physical one yet distinctive enough to be discovered? Is there a soul climate specifically operative upon the inner self just as there is a physical climate specifically operative upon the physical body? In the language of geography, is there a temperate zone of the inner self?

If we take this question with us as we mingle with our fellow-men an answer in the affirmative is soon reached. Some people chill us as though a breath from the North Pole had swept down upon us. Some warm us as though we had suddenly encountered a breath of summer in midwinter. Some are like a garden in which blooms the perpetual rose, while others are a barren desert. Some men repel,

others inspire. No man ever visited Napoleon who did not leave his presence a changed man. There does seem to be an independent qualitative soul atmosphere which not only determines the quality of the self but extends its contagiousness to others.

A comparison of the two statements chosen as the background of this study offers further confirmation. To a considerable portion of the inhabitants of Palestine in the times of Jesus the belief was firmly fixed that this world belonged to the evil one. The whole world lay in the evil one in an altogether too literal sense. An evil spirit caused pain and disease. Another seized the Roman emperor and he taxed and persecuted his subjects. Another seized the taxgatherer and he increased the taxes. A legion entered into another and he went out and lived among the tombs. Demoniactal possession was the glaring example of this world-domination by the evil one. A distinct soul atmosphere was thus operative in which sanity was well-nigh impossible but in which pessimism and body-cutting were perfectly natural. No man can believe that this or any age is an evil one or that the forces of evil have the upper hand and retain any moral or religious sanity of mind.

In contrast to this inner world stands the one revealed in the words: "In Him we live and move and have our being." What a different atmosphere! Despite all the negations of our highest hopes and ideals, in the very face of pain, ugly expressions of evil powers and despondency, one can still say this world is God's world.

The belief that wrong will be worsted and right will finally triumph created an inner climate in which sanity of mind increased, energy of activity grew stronger and stronger, and optimism suffused the whole inner self. From this hidden source God's colaborers and martyrs drew their inspiration and in a deeper sense grew a soul. Christianity surely accomplished a great thing when it could change for men this depressing and soul-destroying atmosphere for one which developed and sustained courage, optimism, dare, faith, and the true life.

The claim that Jesus changed the whole religious climate of the world seems thus to rest upon good grounds. He was essentially a teacher, but this must be interpreted in the full sense of creative efficiency. His knowledge of God and of the true life illustrated and vitalized in his personality created this new world. His knowledge and experience of the eternal realities reveal an inner world of unique religious character, and his aim seems to have been to make this the universal world-atmosphere. That Paul so understood him is evident from the words quoted above from his thinking.

Jesus cast out devils. Exorcism was prevalent, but he does not seem to have practiced it because he did positive soul-building as well as house-cleaning. He did not cast these out by an authoritative word nor by any magic power, if due consideration be given to this constructive side of the process. He did it by illustrating the principle of overcoming evil with good. He stood before the man under this evil influence and declared to him that this is God's world

and not the devil's. He asked him to consider that so intimate was the Father's interest in and knowledge of men that even the very hairs of the head were all numbered in his sight. God's hand in the universe was also so strong and eternally active that not a sparrow ever fell to the ground without his notice. Evil might seem to dominate, but never for one moment did it have the upper hand. By this method Jesus transported the poor unfortunates from the frigid zone into the temperate, and thus set them into the soul atmosphere which changed the whole life. May this insight not explain why Jesus had such success with unlettered disciples? Being free from the hardening influence of traditionalism and the freezing force of clericalism these men were good material round about which Jesus could throw his new creative religious and moral influences.

Jesus' teaching and experience of God, the Father, made belief in the eternal realities a soul-growing climate. Jesus' relation to, and teaching concerning, the Father is religious rather than philosophic. He taught little about God, but he did teach God. He lived in this world, found a life worth while, moved himself with inner-soul freedom, and in the eternal sense had his being. He found this world a good place for a good man and would not that any should miss all the good by being transported bodily out of it. He thus gave force and atmosphere to the religious knowledge of God, life, and the world. It is philosophy or doctrine regnant in personality which creates soul quality. Real revelation comes primarily through personality. Discussions about the primary

reality, whether it be substance, or God, or God-substance, are necessary to arrive at truth; but when one says I and the Father are one, and men reply that in seeing and knowing Jesus of Nazareth there is nothing left to be known concerning God there is present soul-growing atmosphere. Jesus' experience which he calls God is the supreme soul atmosphere.

The presence of this new creative inner world may be discovered again in Jesus' interpretation of the universe in terms of human beings. We use the expression "interpretation," but it is the practical rather than any merely theoretical meaning which is stressed. The latter follows from the former. Jesus lived and worked as though this universe existed solely for the growing of great souls.

Today this view is in disrepute because it is argued that the contracted view of the universe dominant in early times is responsible for this contracted outlook. When one takes the larger view, sees this earth of ours as small as it really is, and then sees the history of the evolution of the worlds and of man, he cannot but see that man hardly deserves this place of supreme importance. Modern science has saved the present generation from such narrow theology.

There is, however, one very important fact bearing on this line of thinking which cannot be overlooked. We know the force of the principle that geography makes history, and we are all evolutionists. There should be no disposition ever to turn a deaf ear to our brilliant leaders in science. We are relegating to the past many of our traditional beliefs,

such as that the world was created by fiat out of nothing, or that God is an absolute *ab extra* wholly supernatural Deity. But when we would place evaluation upon man and this material universe there should be no question as to where the higher value is to be placed. The reasons for this are primarily practical ones. Any theory or teaching which depreciates the eternal value of every individual human being and which loosens for one moment the grip upon the eternal values stands immediately self-condemned. Men become men through faith in the certainty that each is a potential son of God. Call a man a lump of clay or a beast and he will deteriorate. Make his deities sacred animals and his life will be bestial. Talk up his material side and the civilization will take a sad turn in this direction. Believe that man is absolutely caught in a web of organic development and that the fittest by strength to survive will survive and you can become an uncivilized barbarian, as the world-enemies in Germany have become.

The one outstanding reason for the increasingly strong hold the Bible and the teachings of Jesus have upon men is that on every page glows this absolute certainty that men are made in the image of God, that men who strive are always triumphant, that God cares in an eternal sense for every human individual, and that life finds its true meaning only when men exercise themselves unto godliness. There is more than passing significance in the fact that Jesus lived and died for mankind and for individual men and women. It was this undoubted character of his inner self which added to the strength of the

new Christian atmosphere of the world which he created.

If there be then this world within the world we have both an explanation why the pain and growing sorrow of our time is being borne so cheerfully and, further, we have a gospel to preach which can carry us triumphantly through our trying times. Pain in the physical body is nature's signal of danger. It reveals disorder and diseased conditions. Is this not what it is in a spiritual sense? The parallel cannot be applied on all fours since there is the natural pain which follows the loss of our friends. But there may be an acuteness which indicates that we have loved our material things more than we thought. The pain may uncover a selfishness deeper than we knew. It may reveal that we have been living in the atmosphere of selfish gain and enjoyment and have neglected to feed the soul. There is a vital difference between mere sorrow and pain and *Christian* suffering. It is the difference between an inner self developed in the atmosphere of selfish pleasure, self-indulgence, self-gain, and self-idealism and the self grown into the likeness of God environed by the Christian soul atmosphere of faith, hope, love, service, aspiration for Godlikeness. It is a fact of historical knowledge that Christians

never deteriorate, but grow during times of hardness and suffering. They live and move and find their being in God.

This gospel is the one peculiarly fitted for a time of conflict and war. The Christian atmosphere is not one from which conflict is excluded. Jesus' attitude toward life is not the abstract one that life is or ever shall be peaceful like the frozen stream. Life was to him, as it is to every thoughtful man, eternal conflict. Life is equilibrium of forces. Christian character is not a gift but an achievement. Life is growth and growth is change with progress through victory. The effeminate gospel of indolent and supernatural salvation which has robbed so many honest men of vital soul growth and driven others into a selfish pacifism is an unworthy caricature of the militant Jesus of Nazareth. He would not pray that any should be taken up out of the world, but he could believe that men could escape the evil of soul dwarfing in a world of eternal conflict.

Like all the real things of life, the experience of this Christian atmosphere comes not by observation. The door of entry, however, is wide open. It is the study and the companying with this great Soul of Nazareth. To know him and his experience of God is to find a new life.